

# **Everything you need to know before a job interview!**

The Career Center has compiled a guide that takes you through the interview process. It covers everything from the moment you are invited to an interview to the moment you leave it.

We hope these tips will make you feel prepared and confident to face an interview situation.

We can also offer you a simulated interview as part of your preparation for the real one. You are also welcome to visit the Career Center and discuss other questions relating to job interviews.

## **CAREER CENTER**



JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY

## **Some concrete tips before your job interview**

It is often the interview which finally determines whether you get the job or not. Therefore, it is important that you prepare for it. Make a good impression and present yourself in a convincing and credible way. The job might then be yours!

- Practise answering questions. Practice makes you both more confident and more assured. However, don't practise so that you end up sounding like a tape recording during the interview. Your answers need to come naturally.
- Find out information about the company. You can find information on the company's website, [www.allabolag.se](http://www.allabolag.se), through people you know etc.
- Find out the correct address and directions to get to the employer.
- Take the employer's telephone number with you in case anything happens on the way, for example in case you are delayed.
- Carefully think through what you want from the job and the interview, and what the employer may want to know.
- Consider what kind of impression you want to make on the employer (your mood, demeanour, dress, body language etc).
- Make a list of the questions you can imagine being asked and consider/prepare your answers.
- Consider the questions you would like to ask during the interview.
- Read through the job advert, your application letter and CV "one last time".
- Show that you are interested in the job/company. Show that you are giving your full attention to the interview by for example asking questions in return.
- Be on time! Neither too early nor too late. 5-10 minutes before the interview.
- Regarding dress code, it is important that you feel comfortable and that your clothes fit into the job environment. It is better to be over-dressed than under-dressed. Avoid strong smells (perfume, cigarettes, garlic etc).
- Stick to the subject! Beginning by discussing common interests can be a good idea. However, concentrate on presenting yourself and your skills.
- Take the initiative yourself and ask when you will be notified about/receive feedback from the interview.
- Finally: On the interview, you want to make a positive impression and show your real interest - but don't forget just to be yourself!
- Organise your references in advance. Inform them about the job applications when you've reached an interview stage. This will make it easier for them to promote you in the right way.

**Bring with you:**

- A diary or telephone
- Notepad and pen
- Credentials/certificates (in the original plus a copy to give to the employer)
- References (create an attractive document that you can provide that contains the contact details for your referees)
- Your CV and application letter

## Body language

Your body language is important. We humans read each other using different codes and observing behaviour and manner. You have about three minutes to make a first impression. Make it a good first impression!

This begins as soon as you are on your way to the interview. Bear in mind that an employee might see you outside and on your way into the place where you will await the interviewer. Be friendly towards those you come across; you might greet and exchange a word or two with the person in the reception or someone you meet in the corridor etc. This may be a determining factor in you getting the job or not.

### Some concrete tips regarding your body language

**The handshake:** The handshake is an important element and takes place as soon as you meet the people interviewing you and anyone else to whom you are introduced in the organisation. If the other person has a firm handshake, you should respond in the same way.

**Sitting on a chair:** Sit comfortably but not too comfortable. It should not look like you are about to run out through the door. Practise sitting comfortably and in a way to avoid for example shaking legs or something else that may take focus from the interview.

**Irritating habits:** If you know that whenever you grab a pen, you can't stop clicking it ... bring a pencil instead.

**Your voice:** Use your voice wisely. Neither talk over the other person nor whisper; try to get a sense of the tone used by the interviewer.

**Eye contact:** Eye contact is essential, from the moment you shake hands at the start of the interview to the very end. Do not gaze too intensively; this might be seen as threatening or uncomfortably intimate. However, don't keep glancing about and don't look away for too long, as this is a sign that you are unsure and/or not on top of the situation.

**Grimacing:** Some people tend to look worried when being interviewed. Grimacing people do not look as self-assured as people who listens and nods in interest.

**Thoughts:** To avoid grimaces and odd body language, try to block out destructive thoughts such as: “Just think if I make a fool of myself.” Focus on the skills you have and which subjects you want to bring up. You are here because the employer is interested in you - that is a triumph in itself!

**Other tips:** A technique known as “the parrot technique” means trying as far as possible during an interview to resemble the person interviewing you. This means, for instance, that if the person sitting opposite to you displays a very demonstrative body language, you should not sit with your arms folded during the entire interview. Studies show that an employer tends to employ people who resemble themselves in some way or to whom they can relate. Obviously, overdoing this would be ridiculous, so exercise some restraint when doing so.

Getting a conversation going during the interview is a good idea; it should not be a one-way communication. The ideal is to start talking about the job, what would be required of you, and what you would get out of it. Mastering this, will allay the feeling of being scrutinised, and will demonstrate that you are interested in the job in a positive way.

When you meet the interviewer, remember his or her name! Likewise, if the interviewer starts off the interview by presenting the work of the organisation, remember what you have learned. Keeping this in mind as much as possible, you may avoid asking questions about subjects already covered by the interviewer.

When you and the interviewer go to the room where you are to sit down, especially if it is some distance away, it can help to make small talk about a topical issue or the weather. If you can make conversation before the start of the interview, it can make the situation feel a bit easier.

## Commonly asked questions during a job interview

### **Who are you?**

Focus on recent years, and mention those details you consider important for the employer to know. A sound approach is to start with where you are now in your life and go backwards. Avoid repeating all information in your CV, but don't overlook mentioning the most important elements. Also, things you might have learned or examples of ways in which you have honed your skills. Explain in brief what sort of person you are.

*Examples of questions:*

“Who are you?”

“Tell me in brief about yourself.”

“Describe yourself in three/five words.”

“What do you prioritise most in life?”

“How happy are you in yourself and with your life?”

### **Strengths and weaknesses:**

It is important to be aware of your strengths and weaknesses, since the employer wants to see how well you know yourself. Bear in mind that is better to describe your weaknesses as less strong characteristics rather than weak ones. Use positive wording. Say, for instance, that you are sometimes 'keen' to get going instead of using the word 'impatient'.

*Examples of questions:*

“What are your strengths?”

“What are your weaknesses?”

“How do you think that your friends would describe them?”

“Where do you think you could improve?”

“What do you do that attracts most criticism?”

### **The future:**

The interviewer often wants to know how long you plan to stay in the organisation. If you don't know, make it sound as though you would like to stay for quite a while. Focus on professional motives and not family related issues if you don't want to mention you won't stay in the area where you apply for the job. Mentioning the professional reasons might be in your favour.

*Examples of questions:*

“Where will you be in five (or ten) years?”

“What would you like to be doing in five years time?”

“What are your goals and visions for the future?”

“Are you planning to continue studying? If so, in what?”

“How long would you be staying with us?”

### **Work experience:**

Explain previous positions in brief. Consider the essential aspects of this particular position and what could be seen as an asset in your case. What have you learned from past jobs? Try to avoid leaving questions hanging and gaps in your CV; you should be able to talk about your past without feeling uncomfortable. Present a USP (unique selling point) about yourself. It might be an unusual skill or the fact that you have a CV that stands out in the sense of contrasting skills. Never use derogatory terms about previous working places, since this can give the impression that you are prone to be whining.

#### *Examples of questions:*

“What kind of work have you done in the past?”

“Have you done this kind of work before?”

“What kind of merits/professional experience from previous jobs do you have that could benefit you in this one?”

“Why did you leave your previous employer(s)?”

“Explain the gap in your job history.”

“What is the most important for you in a job?”

“Which tasks do you most enjoy doing?”

“What did you like the least at your previous workplaces?”

“How often were you absent from your previous workplace? How come?”

“What are the reasons for your changing jobs in the past?”

“What can you offer that no one else can?”

### **Education**

Describe your training by focusing on what you believe the employer is most interested in. A good idea is to highlight courses and projects carried out in collaboration with companies/organisations. If your degree is of relevance, don't forget to mention that too.

#### *Examples of questions:*

“Tell me in brief about your training.”

“Why did you choose that particular course/education?”

“What have you learned during your training?”

“What is the most important thing you have learned during your training?”

“How have you benefited from your training?”

“What was your degree subject?”

“Did you work in collaboration with any companies/organisations during your studies or training, and if so, in what way?”

### **Why have you applied for this job?**

The employer wants to know how interested you are in the current position and how much you know about the organisation. Describe what interests you about the job and link this to your work experience, education and personal qualities. Do make reference to previous collaborations/contacts with the organisation.

*Examples of questions:*

“Why have you applied for this job?”

“What was it that attracted you to this particular job?”

“What do you consider to be the most important requirement for succeeding in doing this job?”

“Why do you think this job seems/is interesting?”

**Why should we employ you?**

This is where you have your chance to say why you are perfect for the job and why they should employ you specifically. Consider what you have that your competitors may not have.

*Examples of questions:*

“Why should we pick you for the job?”

“What do you have to offer our company/organisation?”

“Why do you think you would fit in with us?”

“Which qualities would you have been seeking, were you the person recruiting?”

**What do you know about us?**

Highlight the most important aspects on the basis of what you have found out about the company/organisation. Make it brief. The employer wants to know how committed/interested you have been in finding out this information.

*Examples of questions:*

“What do you know about us?”

“Have you been in touch with us (the company) before?”

“Explain in brief what you know about us.”

**The workplace:**

These questions concern how you perceive your work and what is important to you. Be yourself, but be modest too and not too demanding. You can provide examples here since these can often be interesting to hear. Naturally, you have had good bosses in the past (you must not appear to be whining), or you know at least some of the qualities that you appreciate in a boss (good at listening, clarity etc).

*Examples of questions:*

“What does the ideal workplace look like in your eyes?”

“What is the most important quality a supervisor/boss can have?”

“Describe a good supervisor/boss.”

“How do you regard the role of the boss?”

“Would you consider travelling a lot/moving with your work?”

“If you don't get this job, what will you do then?”

(Bear in mind that it could seem a little strange if you have not applied for another job, unless you already have one. Having back-up plans demonstrates common sense.)

**Conflict and collaboration:**

Giving lots of examples of a conflict situation may not be such a good idea, but a single example of one with a happy outcome could be interesting, or else a method for dealing with a conflict situation.

*Examples of questions:*

“How do you resolve a conflict?”

“Tell me about a conflict situation you have been in, how you handled it and what you learned from it.”

“What does collaboration mean to you?”

“Have you had difficulty working with others? Why?”

“What kind of person would you rather not work with?”

“Can you cope with setbacks?” Describe a situation where you managed this well.

**Your role in a team:**

Here you can give examples on how you act as part of a team. Choose an example based on the team role you are interested in. If it is a role involving leadership, give examples of when you had such position.

*Examples of questions:*

“Which role do you (most often) take on in a team?”

“Are you able to delegate tasks?”

“What motivates you in your work?”

“Do you work best in a team or on your own?”

“What do you get out of your work?”

“Why do you work?”

“How and what do you prioritise?”

“How do you feel when you are interrupted in the work you are doing to attend to a new and urgent task?”

**Stress versus Little to do:**

If you have a history of stress-related problems, the Career Center is more than willing to help you answer as best you can the following questions.

*Examples of questions:*

“How do you regard stress?”

“How do you cope with stress?”

“How do you regard working under time pressure?”

“How do you regard working overtime?”

“If there is little to do over a given period, how do you cope with that?”

“If there is too much to do over a given period, how do you cope with that?”

**Family/Leisure time/Health:**

Achieving a balance between a full life outside work and your working life is essential. Physical exercise is always seen as a plus, as are hobbies that are considered healthy and normal.

*Examples of questions:*

“What is your family life like?”

“Are you married/living with somebody?” What does your partner do?



“Describe your upbringing.”

“What is your number one priority when you're not working?”

“Which interests do you have in your leisure time?”

“What makes you feel good?”

“What is the most recent book you've read?”

“What have you been doing while job-hunting?”

*Only for certain kinds of work:*

“May we test you for drugs?” “Have you ever been penalised?”

### **Salary:**

Salary is seldom discussed during a job interview because the interviewer(s) will be interested in employing you on the basis of your being the right person for the job. Negotiating salary is therefore usually done on a later occasion or at the end of the interview.

Making reference to statistics and current contracts could be to your advantage, and bear in mind that you can specify a salary range for further discussion.

*Examples of questions:*

“What would you consider a reasonable salary for this position?”

“What are your salary requirements?”

### **References:**

Try to have as up-to-date and relevant references as possible. If you have not been able to organise someone senior as your referee, a colleague would do. It is important that your views are much the same as your employers'; i.e. if you think they have something very positive to say on a subject, your answer should be along the same lines.

*Examples of questions:*

“What do you think your previous employers would have to say about you?”

“Why have you chosen to provide these particular references?”

“You have not provided any references. Could you indicate any?”

### **And finally ...**

*Examples of questions:*

“Do you think that I/we have obtained an accurate picture of you?”

(If there is anything you have not mentioned and you think would be of real advantage to you, this is your last chance to raise it.)

“Is there anything you want to ask or add?”

(It is extremely important that you have some questions ready when you are asked this because it shows you are interested in the job. Write down a number of different kinds of questions so that you don't risk being asked all of these during the course of the interview.)

Examples of questions you could ask are:

“What kinds of skills are you looking for?”

“How does my potential working group look like?”

**“Which are the principal clients of the organisation?”**

**“What expectations do you have on the person seeking the job?”**

**“Which opportunities for development exist within the organisation?”**

**“What do you offer in terms of flexitime and health and fitness activities?”**